

The Institute of Public Affairs

Poles' Expectations Concerning Negotiations with the European Union

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Introduction

Opinion polls conducted in Germany and Austria have shown that the public have been increasingly afraid of the consequences of opening the European Union's labour market to the citizens of Central European countries. In Germany, Gerhard Schröder, candidate for chancellor from the opposition SPD party in the upcoming elections, while supporting Poland's accession to the Union, at the same time proposed the application of transition periods concerning the access of Polish workers to the EU labour market. The German politician holds the opinion that, if Poles enjoyed the right to work in EU countries, that might lead to social tensions and boost the popularity of right wing parties.¹ Members of the ruling CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag also placed numerous conditions upon their approval of the Union's enlargement to the East. They are also predominantly interested in restricting the free movement of people during the time needed to level the economic situation of the old and future members. According to the members of the German parliament, that period should last at least until 2015.²

In Poland, there have also been opinions warning against threats posed by integration with the European Union for Polish agriculture, industry, or finally, for Poland's sovereignty and identity. That attitude towards integration involves a temptation to extend protection periods for Polish agriculture or the steel industry in exchange for restricting the right of Poles to settle and work freely in the EU countries. Krzysztof Popowicz, author of a report published by the Institute of Public Affairs,³ believes that consent to such an arrangement would make Poles second class European citizens.

The Institute of Public Affairs has conducted research concerning the expectations of Poles related to negotiations with the European Union. The research was carried out under the project monitoring integration processes,⁴ with the main goal of determining which of the issues covered by the ongoing negotiations are viewed as the most important by Poles. The study was also meant to determine whether or not

¹ See, e.g., "Nie stawiajmy warunków, article published by the *Rzeczpospolita* daily, 18 June 1998; "Germany's Moderniser," *Financial Times*, 11 May 1998.

² See *Rzeczpospolita* 8 July 1998.

³ K. Popowicz, *Strategiczne cele mandatu negocjacyjnego Polski z Unią Europejską* [Strategic goals of the Polish mandate for negotiations with the European Union], report published as part of the Recommendations series by the Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw, June 1998.

⁴ Field research was conducted by the Pracownia Badań Społecznych polling centre from Sopot on May 16 and 17, 1998. The surveyed population was a representative sample of adult Poles, comprised of 1,100 respondents.

there was any relationship between the attitudes towards the main negotiation topics and the general attitude towards integration with the European Union, and if so, what the relationship was. The question was whether the order of priorities of the social groups which declare the strongest support for integration is the same as the order of priorities of those who are indifferent or negative about Poland's accession to the European Union.

It is also very important to follow on a regular basis the changes occurring in the attitudes of Poles towards integration with the European Union. Since the launching of the negotiations, there has been a growing number of media reports on the subject, and contentious issues have been tackled more frequently. This may have an impact on the perception of integration processes by the public.

Main Conclusions

- Yet another decline was observed in support for integration with the European Union. At the moment, the number of people declaring their readiness to vote for Poland's accession to the EU in a possible referendum is lower compared to February.
- A fall in support for Poland's accession to the EU was seen mainly among those social groups which are usually less positive towards integration, while the opposite trend was observed among college and university graduates whose support for integration is stronger compared to other social groups. Hence, one may notice a growing polarisation of opinions held by the public.
- The public in Poland attach a major importance both to the future of agriculture and to the right of Poles to work abroad. However, the latter topic of the negotiations is more vital to those social groups which declare particularly strong support for integration with the European Union.
- The issue of free purchase of land by foreigners received relatively little attention from the public, including farmers. Only 15% of the surveyed farmers considered the issue one of the two most important topics of the ongoing negotiations.
- No direct relationship was observed between the support for Poland negotiating successfully the right for its citizens to work freely in the EU countries, and the respondents' individual readiness to work abroad. The majority of Poles supporting integration see their future in Poland's growing private sector. Readiness to move abroad was not pegged to the level of support for integration.
- Two leading attitudes towards negotiations with the EU may be observed among the Polish public: one held by those who believe that the goal of the talks is to safeguard the Polish status quo, and another one by those who see the negotiations as a chance to further modernise their country by means of creating new development opportunities.
- The strongest defensive attitudes were seen among farmers, as 25% of them declared plans to vote against integration, while 25% would vote for. However, that attitude is not equally characteristic of the entire rural population, 53% of whom would support integration. These figures reflect a growing differentiation of opinions among the rural population.

- In the course of time, not only the attitudes towards integration have been changing, but also opinions concerning the benefits and disadvantages of the process for particular social groups. Several years ago, the perception of the situation of farmers and blue-collar workers was more optimistic, whereas now, there is a prevailing belief that the two groups will incur losses as a result of the integration process.

1. Changes in the attitude of the Polish public towards the European Union

Negotiations with the European Union have encouraged a growing interest in these issues by the media. Many publications and statements tackle on contentious matters. That may be connected with a decline in public support for Poland's accession to European structures, which has been observed in our research. At the moment, the number of people declaring their readiness to vote in favour of Poland's accession to the European Union in a possible referendum is lower compared to February 1998.

It is interesting to note that the fall in the number of people declaring support for Poland's accession to the EU has not been accompanied by a simultaneous increase in the number of respondents disapproving of the process, but a growth was seen in the number of people who could not make a definite decision on the subject. This may reflect a growing uncertainty and confusion related to the integration process.

Table 1
Declarations of vote in a possible referendum concerning Poland's accession to the European Union

Declared way of voting	Replies (in percent)	
	N=1066, February 1998	N=1100, June 1998
In favour of Poland's accession to the EU	64	58
Against Poland's accession to the EU	9	10
Will not vote in the referendum	13	11
Don't know	14	21
Total	100	100

Source: Data obtained by the Institute of Public Affairs

The strongest support for Poland's accession to the European Union was declared by college and university graduates, respondents holding managerial positions, white-collar workers, as well as by the unemployed, young people and students.

The research showed that the knowledge of at least one foreign language at a level enabling communication with foreigners was a variable differentiating Poles' attitude towards European integration. The lack of language barriers in communication with representatives of other nations encouraged support for Poland's accession to the

European Union. A positive attitude towards European integration was additionally encouraged by close contacts abroad and familiarity with West European countries.⁵ People who have worked abroad more frequently support integration (74%) compared to those who have never had such experience in their career life (58%). The group comprised of people who had no experience of working abroad included a much greater number of respondents who did not know how they would vote in the accession referendum.

A positive attitude towards Poland's negotiations with the European Union was declared by the unemployed who viewed the opening of borders and market unification as an opportunity to return to active career life and improve their individual situation in the labour market.

The intention of voting against Poland's accession to the Union was more common among elder respondents, people with less education and lower incomes per head in a household, as well as among farm workers (28%) and farmers (25%). On the other hand, it is interesting to note that, overall, the attitudes of the rural population did not vary from the national average. Only 13% of respondents living in rural areas would vote against integration. The figure reflects a growing differentiation of opinions among the rural population, which may be seen, for example, in a much greater reluctance shown by farmers towards European integration, compared to the overall population of rural areas.

A comparison of attitudes declared by Poles in March and in June 1998, may lead to the conclusion that support for the country's accession to the EU has fallen mainly among those groups of respondents who have been traditionally less positive towards the process, i.e., among elder people, the lowest income earners, pensioners, and housewives.

An exception from that rule has been a relatively large decline in support declared by young people (under 24 years of age) who usually support integration. Opinions held by that group show little stability, and therefore, will tend to vary.

Despite an overall fall in support for Poland's accession to the European Union, a growth in approval of the process was observed among college and university graduates, people holding managerial positions, and white-collar workers. That may reflect a growing polarisation of opinions held by the Polish public.

In general terms, one may say that the current decline in support for European integration does not mean an increase in the popularity of anti-European attitudes, but only a growth in uncertainty and hesitation related to the ongoing negotiations. These appear to be connected with a growing amount of information circulated about the process of negotiations, a more frequent discussion of contentious issues, and the public's uncertainty concerning the goals of the ongoing talks, as the Polish political elites have not managed to formulate these goals distinctly and clearly to date.

2. The perception negotiation issues by the public

The ongoing talks between Poland and the European Union concern a great number of issues mostly related to the harmonisation of Polish legislation with the

⁵ This may be seen, for example, in the report *Duchowieństwo polskie wobec perspektywy integracji europejskiej* [Polish clergy towards European integration prospects] published by the Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw 1998.

acquis communautaire. However, particular issues tackled on during the negotiations receive varied interest from the public in Poland and in the EU member states.

Poles attach the greatest importance to issues concerning the future of agriculture and the achievement of the right to work on the EU territory. A large interest in enabling Poles to work in the EU has been accompanied by a much lesser pressure placed upon achieving the right to settle freely in the EU member states. This may suggest that Poles are more interested in short term work abroad rather than permanent migration.

Table 2
Issues considered to be the most important in negotiations
between Poland and the European Union

Negotiation issues	Group of respondents (in percent) attaching importance to a particular issue N=1100
The future of Polish agriculture	66
The right of Poles to work in the EU member states	54
The right of Poles to settle freely in the EU member states	37
The future of the Polish coal mining industry	21
The right enabling foreigners to buy land freely in Poland	10

The figures in the right column do not add up to 100% because respondents indicated two issues which they considered the most important during the negotiations.

Source: Data obtained by the Institute of Public Affairs.

The future of the Polish coal mining industry aroused lesser concern compared to the future of agriculture because, in the consciousness of Poles, the former issue affects a relatively smaller number of people. Prospects for the coal industry were considered an important issue in the context of negotiations especially by people holding managerial positions, respondents with primary education, and inhabitants of large cities.

It is also worth stressing that relatively few people regarded the sale of land to foreigners as one of the most important issues for the negotiations.

The future of Polish agriculture is considered vital among the topics for negotiations with the Union mainly by elder people and, naturally, by people directly connected with agriculture, i.e., farmers, farm workers, and inhabitants of rural areas. Young people pay the least attention to that issue.

The right to work in the EU was the number one priority for respondents between 18 and 24 years of age, students, college and university graduates, and for the unemployed. Among these social groups, the future of agriculture was considered the second most important issue for the negotiations. Respondents who declared the knowledge of at least one foreign language believed that the right to work in the EU was at least as important as the future of agriculture.

Farmers as a group attached relatively little importance to the right to work in EU countries. Only 34% of the surveyed farmers indicated the issue as being the most important, while 87% held the opinion that the most important issue was the future of Polish agriculture. It is also particularly interesting to note that barely 15% farmers mentioned the purchase of land by foreigners; they considered the issue the least important of the five listed topics.

On the whole, the right to work abroad is the most important to the groups showing particularly strong support for integration, whereas weak support for integration is accompanied by a greater interest in the future of agriculture. Thus, one may conclude that the outcome of talks between Poland and the EU concerning the right for Poles to work in the EU will have a major impact on the level of public support for integration.

The importance attached to Poles achieving the right to work on the territory of the European Union may be a result of two factors. On the one hand, Poles may be interested in seeking employment abroad. However, on the other hand, it is also possible that Poles are interested in their country becoming a fully fledged member of the Union, a member that would have all the rights enjoyed by other member states, although personally, they have no intention of going to work abroad. Thus, the point might be an equal treatment of all the citizens of the Union, and a fear that Poles would become second class citizens.⁶

Nevertheless, it should be noted that Poles do not expect that they will be granted that right immediately upon the achievement of the EU membership by Poland, and they expect a transition period of several years.

In all social groups (with the exception of farmers), the number of people holding the opinion that Poles will have to wait before they get the right to work in the Union was twice the number of respondents who expected that Poles would be able to work abroad right after the accession to the Union.

Table 3
Opinions about Poles being granted the right to work legally abroad

In your opinion, after Poland's accession to the European Union, will Poles have the right to work legally abroad?	Replies in percent N=1100
Yes, right after the accession	18
Yes, but only after several years from the time of accession to the Union	40
No	10
Difficult to say	32
Total	100

⁶ See *Negocjacje z Unią Europejską - opinie Polaków* [Negotiations with the European Union: Opinions held by Poles], the Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw, March 1998, p. 10-11.

Source: Data obtained by the Institute of Public Affairs

The fact that Poles expect that they will achieve the right to work in the EU member states as a result of the negotiations does not mean that they are personally inclined to exercise that right. They see their future in their own country, in a fast growing private sector. They are also increasingly confident in their own potential. Over the past five years, a major growth has been observed in the number of people who would like to work in their own businesses. A definite willingness to work abroad was declared by only one out of ten Poles taking part in the survey. Among young people and among the unemployed, the percentage of respondents interested in seeking such employment was higher than the average.

Table 4
Preferences concerning employment

Preferred type of employment	Replies in percent N=1100	
	August 1992 N=1823 CBOS polling centre figures	May 1998 N=1100 Institute of Public Affairs figures
Running one's own business	26	41
State-owned (or co-operative) company	29	20
Private company (or denationalised company)	25	10
Work abroad	6	10
Not working at all	4	9
Difficult to say	10	10
Total	100	100

Source: Data obtained by the Institute of Public Affairs; *Planowane zmiany i preferencje dotyczące miejsca pracy. Komunikat z badań* (Intended changes and preferences concerning place of work. Report from research) published by the CBOS polling centre, Warsaw, August 1992.

Nearly three quarters of Poles, being given a free choice, would decide to work as hired labour or to run their own businesses in Poland, and only one in ten Poles would prefer to emigrate and seek employment abroad. Nevertheless, it should be noted that one in four respondents (26%) would encourage their own children to go to work abroad. But that concerned mainly temporary work. Thus, one may presume that the main purpose of going to work abroad would be to get professional experience, to enhance one's knowledge and orientation in the world, as well as to gather capital in order to start an independent life in Poland, i.e., to establish one's own business or to buy an apartment.

Table 5
Preferences concerning the place of work of one's child

Preferred place of work	Replies in percent N=110 0
A good job in Poland	62
Temporary work abroad	18
Permanent migration abroad	8
Difficult to say	12
Total	100

Source: Data obtained by the Institute of Public Affairs.

Under these circumstances, the importance attached to the achievement of the right for Poles to work abroad need not be a result of their personal readiness to take advantage of that possibility. To many respondents, it is rather a matter of Poland's future and the future of the young generation of Poles for whom they would like to ensure the same opportunities as those enjoyed by the citizens of other member states.

Research conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs provides grounds for the conclusion that, although nearly three quarters of Poles (73%) believe that they are not provided sufficient information about the ongoing negotiations, they have a clear opinion concerning Poland's readiness for the talks (86%). The number of Poles who think that their country is well prepared for the negotiations (42%) is nearly the same as the number of those who believe that it is not prepared well enough (44%).⁷

In this context, the most important opinions are those concerning the factors which determine the negotiation process, i.e., whether its course depends on Poland itself, the pace of its reforms and modernisation, or it depends on external factors, the political will of the EU member states, the economic situation, or the personal characteristics of negotiators.

Table 6
Opinions concerning the factors which impact on the terms of Poland's accession to the European Union

Factors that impact on the terms of Poland's accession to the European Union	Replies in percent February 1998	Replies in percent June 1998
The level of advancement of Polish reforms and the country's modernisation	35	30
Political decisions of EU member states	31	29
Qualifications, skills and determination of Polish negotiators	20	23
Difficult to say	14	18
Total	100	100

Source: Data obtained by the Institute of Public Affairs.

⁷ See *Negocjacje z Unią Europejską - opinie Polaków*, op. cit.

The Polish public are divided over the factors determining the terms of Poland's accession to the European Union. In the course of time and together with the advancement of the negotiations the opinions held by Poles are becoming increasingly scattered. In addition, the past four months have seen a growth in the number of people who cannot identify the factors which determine the terms of Poland's accession to the Union. Instead of the expected crystallisation of the public's attitude towards the negotiations, the launching of the talks has blurred the perception of the process. That may be explained with the impact produced by incomplete information supplied out of context, which is at the same time complex, and which the public receive via the media.

The number of respondents regarding the advancement of reform and modernisation processes as the most important is nearly the same as the number of those who attach the greatest importance to political decisions of EU member states. The group of Poles who believe that the outcome of the ongoing talks is determined predominantly by the qualifications, skills and determination of Polish negotiators is not much smaller.

The advancement of reform and modernisation processes was particularly often indicated as the factor determining the terms of Poland's accession to the Union by representatives of the intellectual elite (college and university graduates, people holding managerial positions and white-collar workers), public sector workers, as well as by the highest income earners. At the same time, the opinion that the terms of accession would depend on the attitude of persons involved in the negotiations was the least frequent among the intellectual elite.

The greatest weight was attached to political decisions of EU member states especially by respondents holding managerial positions, college and university graduates, as well as by Poles professionally connected with or living in rural areas.

The fact that the belief in the decisive power of political choices made by EU member states was the strongest among college and university graduates seems to reflect that group's strong consciousness of the role of the public opinion in EU countries. As one may see, that belief is accompanied by pro-reformatory or pro-modernisation attitudes. However, the same belief in the vital importance of political decisions of EU countries, may be a result of a feeling of helplessness with regard to the Union as a stronger partner. Therefore, differences in attitudes towards integration may be observed mainly in replies to the question concerning the determination of negotiators and the need for the country to be well prepared.

One may say that people who vest their hopes in the integration processes have a different approach towards the negotiations compared to those who are dominated by fears. The former group attach a relatively greater importance to achieving terms of accession, which would provide Poles with new opportunities for activity. Members of the latter group hold the opinion that successful negotiations involve predominantly safeguarding Poland's status quo. Groups that hold defensive attitudes tend to view the talks as a zero-result game in which benefits for one of the sides must imply losses for the other side. That approach by principle rules out the possibility of working out arrangements advantageous for both sides during the process of negotiations.⁸

3. Expected benefits and losses related to integration

⁸ Ibid.

Support for European integration is connected with expected benefits that the accession to the European Union may produce for Poland and its citizens.

According to respondents, in Poland, integration will be advantageous mainly for intellectual, business and political elites. On the other hand, the accession to the Union is particularly often seen as disadvantageous for blue-collar workers and farmers.

The people have no doubts concerning the future situation of foreign businessmen and Polish elites; opinions on the matter are concerted and clear. A greater diversification of opinions may be observed concerning potential benefits of the process in the case of blue-collar workers, the unemployed, farmers, and the former communist *apparatchiks*. Poles believe that there is no relationship between Poland's accession to the European Union and the situation of the Polish clergy (that opinion is shared by the clergymen themselves).

Table 7
Opinions concerning the benefits produced by Poland's integration with the European Union for particular social groups.

Social group	Replies in percent N=1100			
	will gain from integration	will lose because of integration	will neither gain nor lose	difficult to say
Foreign businessmen	72	5	9	14
Well educated people	67	6	13	14
Polish businessmen	64	14	9	13
Political elites	61	9	14	16
Blue-collar workers	23	40	18	19
Fraudsters and con men	41	22	16	21
Former communist <i>apparatchiks</i>	23	22	25	30
The unemployed	33	27	21	19
The clergy	18	18	38	26
Farmers	16	54	12	18

Source: Data obtained by the Institute of Public Affairs

Respondents who regard European integration as an opportunity for themselves and for the remaining social groups are mainly the intellectual and business elites, as well as the unemployed and people between 25 and 59 years of age. Thus, one may say that integration is considered advantageous mostly by people whose financial situation is the best, and by those who are the most active in the economy.

Although there is a prevailing belief among the public that blue-collar workers and farmers will lose as a result of the integration process, but in certain social groups a large number of respondents were more optimistic in their projections. For example, the expectation that integration would improve the situation of the workers was more frequently declared by private entrepreneurs (35%), college and university graduates (32%), and by the unemployed (32%). The opinion that the process would produce

advantages for farmers was more frequent among the unemployed (21%), as well as among private entrepreneurs (18%) and white-collar workers (18%).

A negative impact to be produced by integration on the situation of blue-collar workers was expected especially by the public sector workers (48%), farmers (48%), and respondents holding managerial positions. It is interesting to note that deterioration in the situation of farmers was expected more frequently by people holding managerial positions (71%) than by farmers themselves (64%). The research supplied yet another proof of the differentiation of opinions among the rural population. Whereas 64% of farmers and 63% of farm workers were convinced that integration would impact negatively on the situation of farmers, the figure for the rural population was only 52%.

Opinions concerning the impact of the integration process on the situation of the unemployed were not unanimous. The unemployed themselves were rather optimistic about their future. The belief that the process would be advantageous for them was declared by 36% of the unemployed, i.e., more frequently compared the average figure for the entire surveyed population. The opinion that integration would improve the situation of the unemployed was particularly often declared by students (47%) and young people (43%), as well as by the poorest respondents (41%). Respondents convinced about the negative impact of Poland's accession to the Union on the situation of the unemployed included inhabitants of large cities and unskilled workers.

The criminal aspect of integration (benefits to be produced for fraudsters and con men) was particularly often indicated by farm workers (63%), farmers (56%), the unemployed (49%), and by respondents with an average level of income per household member, i.e., between PLN 301 and PLN 400 per month per head (49%). An optimistic opinion regarding that aspect of integration was held by private entrepreneurs, among whom the prevailing view (38%) was that fraudsters and con men would lose as a result of the process.

Having compared the results of research by the Institute of Public Affairs and the results obtained by the CBOS polling centre in 1992,⁹ one may say that there has been a change in the public perception of the consequences of European integration for workers, farmers and the unemployed. Six years ago, the optimistic opinion that the situation of workers will improve was more frequent, while now the common belief is the opposite. A change has also been observed in the projected impact of integration on the situation of farmers. In 1992, opinions expecting an improvement were as frequent as those projecting a deterioration. Now, the prevailing belief is that integration will impact negatively on the situation of farmers. On the other hand, a greater optimism has been observed regarding the public's opinion on the impact that Poland's accession to the EU will produce on the situation of the unemployed. Six years ago, the opinion expecting a deterioration was voiced more often, while now, the optimistic opinion that integration will improve the situation of the jobless is held by a greater number of people.

Thus, one may say that farmers are the most pessimistic in evaluating their own situation in the context of European integration. As a group, they also feel the greatest confusion concerning the process of negotiations.

⁹ Cf. *Konsekwencje procesu integracji Polski--*, CBOS, Warsaw, 6 May 1992.

Report prepared by
Maria Gerszewska and Jacek Kucharczyk